

Message Text

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22

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 EB-07 /070 W

----- 015252

R 161418Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2176

INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

HQ USSOUTHCOM SCJ2

C O N F I D E N T I A L MONTEVIDEO 3458

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UY

SUBJ: EARLY IMPRESSIONS OF MENDEZ GOVERNMENT - PART TWO

REF: MONTEVIDEO 3438 (DTG 141955Z SEP 76)

1. SUMMARY: DIRECT MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT HAS INCREASED SINCE THE MENDEZ ADMINISTRATION TOOK OFFICE. WHILE ALL ARE NOT IN THE CABINET ITSELF, SIX MILITARY MEN HOLD CABINET RANK WHEREAS ONLY ONE DID PRIOR TO SEPTEMBER 1. A NEW SECRETARIAT OF COORDINATION, PLANNING AND INFORMATION, HEADED BY AN AIR FORCE BRIGADIER, HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME AN IMPORTANT ENTITY. MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE BEEN NAMED TO HEAD KEY AUTONOMOUS AGENCIES FORMERLY HEADED BY CIVILIANS AND OTHER IMPORTANT POSTS HAVE GONE TO OFFICERS AND/OR THEIR RELATIVES. MILITARY INFLUENCE IN GOVERNMENT IS NOT NEW, HOWEVER, AND WE BELIEVE THAT THE INCOMING PRESIDENT, LIKE BORDABERRY BEFORE HIM, SHARES THE MILITARY'S ESSENTIALLY CONSERVATIVE OUTLOOK. THUS, WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE MAJOR POLICY CHANGES. FOREIGN POLICY WILL REMAIN CLOSELY ATTUNED TO OTHERS IN THE SOUTHERN CONE WITH WHOM URUGUAY SHARES SOMETHING OF A SIEGE MENTALITY. ALTHOUGH THE GOU HAS BEEN AND IS SUPPORTING THE U.S. IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA, CONFIDENTIAL

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A CONTINUATION OF THIS POLICY WILL DEPEND IN PART ON OUR

RELATIONS WITH THE REGION AND IN PART ON THE RESOLUTION OF THE EXISTING PROBLEMS RELATED TO HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES.

2. THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE MILITARY'S ROLE IN GOVERNMENT WAS BEGUN UNDER PRESIDENT BORDABERRY IN 1973 AND INCREASED UNDER DEMICHELI LAST JUNE WHEN THE COUNCIL OF THE NATION WAS FORMED AND THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL GIVEN BROADER POWERS (MONTEVIDEO 2222). THE INITIAL THRUST OF THE MENDEZ ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN NOT ONLY TO FURTHER THAT POLICY BY GIVING THE THREE SERVICE CINCS AND THE CHIEF OF THE JOINT STAFF (ESMACO) MINISTERIAL RANK BUT ALSO TO AUGMENT THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE MILITARY MEN TO HIGH POSITIONS.

3. THE MAJOR GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURAL CHANGE MADE SO FAR BY PRESIDENT MENDEZ WAS THE CREATION OF A SECRETARIAT OF COORDINATION, PLANNING AND INFORMATION, THE GRANTING OF CABINET RANK TO THE SECRETARY HEADING IT AND THE NAMING OF AIR FORCE BRIGADIER JOSE CARDOZO, FORMER CHIEF OF THE JOINT STAFF (ESMACO), AS SECRETARY. THE NEW SECRETARIAT NOT ONLY ASSUMED THE FUNCTIONS OF THE FORMER OFFICE OF PLANNING AND BUDGET BUT ALSO BECAME THE GOVERNMENT'S INFORMATION CENTER AND WAS GIVEN AUTHORITY TO COORDINATE THE ACTIONS OF THE OTHER MINISTRIES. EVEN THOUGH CARDOZO SAID A FEW DAYS BEFORE TAKING OFFICE THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHAT IT WOULD ENTAIL, IT IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE THAT HE CAN MAKE OF IT AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT AND BECOME ONE OF THE KEY FIGURES IN THE GOU. A FEW DAYS AFTER ASSUMING THE SECRETARIAT, CARDOZO WAS NAMED URUGUAYAN GOVERNOR TO THE IDB.

4. MILITARY OFFICERS HAVE ALSO TAKEN OVER OTHER IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT POSTS FORMERLY HELD BY CIVILIANS. GENERAL ABDON RAIMUNDEZ MOVED UP TO THE PRESIDENCY OF THE BANK OF THE REPUBLIC. GENERAL ANTONIO CIRILLO WAS NAMED PRESIDENT OF UTE, THE STATE ELECTRIC MONOPOLY, AND COL. AGUSTIN ANDRES, VICE PRESIDENT. AIR FORCE BRIGADIER JORGE BORAD HAS BECOME PRESIDENT OF ANCAP, THE STATE PETROLEUM MONOPOLY (WHICH ALSO PRODUCES ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES AND CEMENT). AMONG OTHER POSTS GOING TO MILITARY OFFICERS WERE THE INTENDENCIAS (GOVERNORSHIPS) IN THE DEPARTMENTS OF DURAZNO, FLORES AND SAN JOSE, WHERE COLONELS REPLACED ELECTED CIVILIAN INTENDENTES.

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5. FINALLY, WHETHER BECAUSE OF ABILITY OR NEPOTISM, RELATIVES OF SOME MILITARY MEN ALSO HAVE UNDERTAKEN RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT JOBS. AMONG FORMER COUNCILORS OF STATE RE-ELECTED FOR THE 1976-81 TERM WAS DRA. AURORA ALVAREZ DE SILVA LEDESMA, SISTER OF FOURTH DIVISION COMMANDER GENERAL GREGORIO ALVAREZ. PROF. JOSE VADORA ROZIER, BROTHER OF ARMY CINC VADORA, WAS NAMED FIRST ALTERNATE (SUPLENTE) COUNCILOR OF STATE. VADORA MOVED UP TO THE COUNCIL ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AS COUNCILOR

ETCHEVERRY SOUGHT, AND WAS GRANTED, PERMISSION TO REMAIN IN HIS POST AS MINISTER OF LABOR. THE NEW MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND ENERGY, ING. LUIS MEYER, IS BROTHER OF AIR FORCE COL. ROBERTO MEYER, FORMER CHIEF OF AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE AND NOW HEAD OF THE AIR ACADEMY.

6. APART FROM GRUMBLING AMONG THE POLITICIANS, THE IMPACT OF THE INCREASED MILITARY PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT SHOULD NOT RESULT IN A BASIC REORIENTATION OF POLICY. KEY DECISIONS IN THE PAST WERE MADE BY THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL. THE THREE CINCS WERE MEMBERS OF BOTH AND GRANTING THEM MINISTERIAL RANK DOES NOT CHANGE THE MILITARY INPUT INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS. SOME CIVILIAN MINISTERS MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO FEEL CONSTRAINED BY THE PRESENCE OF SIX MILITARY MEN WHEN MINISTERS GATHER RATHER THAN ONE, AS UNDER BORDABERRY, BUT THE POTENTIAL FOR POLICY CHANGE IS NOT GREAT BECAUSE THE TWO COUNCILS MENTIONED ABOVE MADE KEY NATIONAL DECISIONS AND NORMAL MINISTRY OPERATIONS WERE MONITORED IN MOST MINISTRIES BY DIRECTORS GENERAL (NUMBER 3 POST IN EACH MINISTRY) WHO REPORTED TO ESMACO. BRIG. CARDOZO PREVIOUSLY HELD A VERY INFLUENTIAL POSITION AS HEAD OF ESMACO (AND CONCURRENTLY AS SECRETARY OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL). HIS MOVE DOES NOT BRING A NEW ELEMENT INTO EITHER THE POLICY COUNCILS OR INFORMATION CONTROL SYSTEM OF THE ADMINISTRATION.

7. THE NEW FACTOR IN THE EQUATION IS APARICIO MENDEZ. ALTHOUGH SURROUNDED BY MILITARY MEN IN KEY POSITIONS, THE PRESIDENT IS A MAN OF INTELLECT AND A SKILLED POLITICIAN WHO MANY BELIEVE WILL BE ABLE TO DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE MILITARY. HE HIMSELF TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT HE WAS NOT AN "INSTRUMENT" OF THE MILITARY, AND MAINTAINS FIRMLY THAT URUGUAY'S PRESENT GOVERNMENT IS A CIVILIAN-MILITARY ONE IN WHICH THE FORMER CAN AND DO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE. BASICALLY, CONFIDENTIAL

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HOWEVER, HE, LIKE BORDABERRY BEFORE HIM, SHARES THE CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF THE MILITARY. LITTLE CHANGE IN FOREIGN POLICY IS ANTICIPATED UNDER THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. IT IS EXPECTED TO CONTINUE ITS FIRM ANTI-COMMUNIST POSTURE AND TO FURTHER CEMENT CLOSE RELATIONS WITH ITS SOUTHERN CONE NEIGHBORS WITH WHOM IT SHARES SOMETHING OF A SIEGE MENTALITY. IT MAY HAVE AN INCREASINGLY AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES, WANTING TO REMAIN IDENTIFIED WITH AND SUPPORTIVE TO US, BUT CONCERNED ABOUT INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO URUGUAY AND EVEN MORE CONCERNED ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AS THEY MIGHT AFFECT BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES. SIRACUSA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CABINET, POLICIES, POLITICAL MILITARY RELATIONS, FORM OF GOVERNMENT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MONTEV03458
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760350-0966
From: MONTEVIDEO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760954/aaaabtro.tel
Line Count: 166
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 MONTEVIDEO 3438
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 MAR 2004 by morefirh>; APPROVED <27 OCT 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EARLY IMPRESSIONS OF MENDEZ GOVERNMENT - PART TWO
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UY, (MENDEZ, APARICIO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006